

# Parts of an OED Entry: More Than You Ever Wanted to Know

The *OED* breaks down each entry into four types of information. These are as follows:

- I. I-a. **Identification** of the main form;  
I-b. **Phonetic Pronunciation** (in parentheses);  
I-c. **Part of speech**;  
I-d. **Earlier forms or spellings** [if any are known];
- II. **Morphological History or Form History** [etymological formula appears in square brackets];
- III. **Signification** (meaning or meanings of the word);
- IV. **Illustrative Quotations** (demonstration of the word being used in a particular sense—listed from examples appearing in writing, each listed chronologically).

The tiny cross indicates an archaic word. Next, the number "1" indicates this material applies to the first common meaning only. Other numbered meanings may follow.

Main Form

Phonetic Pronunciation

Parts of Speech formed from the word. "Sb." means only substantive exists.

These numbers indicate 14th and 15th century variants

17th century variant forms or spellings

The bracketed etymology traces the source of the word—in this case, from a French term.

**Passant** (pæˈsɑnt), *a.* (sb.) Also 4-5 -aunt, -e, 7-ent. [a. F. *passant*, pr. Pppl. of *passer* to *PASS*.]

Here, the status of the word appears. "Obs" stands for "obsolete."

•1. Surpassing, exceeding; excelling; = *PASSING* *ppl.* *a.* 3. *Obs.*

c. 1386 CHAUCER *Knt.'s T.* 1249. For every wight that . . . wolde his thankes han a passant name Hath preyed þat he myghte been of that game. 1413 *Pilgr. Sowle* (Caxton 1483) v. v. 76 The stones sholde nought haue kept them fro syngynge, for the passaunt ioye. c. 1485 *Digby Myst.* v. 612 *Mynde.* Coryous aray I wyll euer haunt. *Vnderstondyng.* And I, ffal[s]nesse, to be passaunt.

•2. Passing, transitory, transient, fugitive. *Obs.*

c. 1400 tr. *Secreta Secret., Gov. Lords.* 57 Coueyte nocht þinges corruptibles & passant. 1604 WEBSTER *Ode in Arch's of Triumph*, For pleasure's stream Is like a dream, Passant and fleet as is a shade. a 1677 BARROW *Wks.* (1686) II. Sermon. xvi. 223 Our actions (even our passant words and our secret thoughts). 1715 JANE BARKER *Exilius* II. II. 55 All the Glories of this World are passant.

The "c." (Latin *circa*) indicates an approximate date. The numbers in **bold print** refer to the first recorded date the *OED* editors have found for the word's appearance in written form with this particular meaning. If the work comes from a famous author used as a standard dating marker, that author's name appears in all capital letters, along with an abbreviated version of the work's title and line numbers or pages (if applicable). These entries are listed chronologically under each individual meaning. Entries for a different meaning have a separate list with their own chronological entries—such as in entry #2 here.

Secondary meanings appear numbered sequentially with their own annotation.

**NB:** Each volume of the printed edition of the *OED* has in the front of it a key to symbols and abbreviations. If you are using the online version, you can access a list of symbols and abbreviations from the "help" menu. An enlarged and expanded discussion appears in pages xxviii-iv of the introduction in volume A.